



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1120
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**EU Statement in Response to the Report by the Head of the
OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Bernd Bochart**

The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Bernd Bochart to the Permanent Council in his new capacity. Mr. Ambassador, we thank you for your comprehensive report.

2017 will mark the 20th anniversary of the OSCE Presence in Albania. Following the events in Albania in 1997, the support of the OSCE to Albania has been essential in preparing elections, building trust in newly created institutions, and bolstering the rule of law. In 2014, the Council of the European Union decided to grant Albania EU Candidate Status, acknowledging the progress made by the country. The EU remains firmly committed to Albania's EU integration process, and is determined to accompany and support this process. It is very clear to the European Union that Albania is firmly committed to its EU reform agenda.

Today, the OSCE Presence continues to make very important contributions to developments in Albania. We commend the contribution of the OSCE Presence in the process of substantial reform of the justice sector and welcome its plans to engage with the justice institutions to be created in order to provide technical advice and assistance. In this connection, we congratulate again Albania on the recent unanimous adoption of the constitutional amendments, which constitute provisions for a deep and comprehensive judicial reform. This unprecedented step addresses a longstanding request by the overwhelming majority of the citizens for justice that is accountable, independent and transparent. Once implemented, it will be a major contribution to the fight against corruption and organised crime. A swift and thorough implementation of the reform is now key and we are convinced that this reform will be

transformative for other areas too. A constructive dialogue in Parliament will be essential in this respect.

Important steps forward on other issues, in particular related to the rule of law, starting from the fight against organized crime and corruption, have been made. The fight against organized crime shows a positive trend in a number of areas, with an intensification of law enforcement activities including drug-related crimes, economic crime, and trafficking of human beings. Albania needs to intensify its efforts to ensure a strong track record in the fight against corruption and organised crime, in particular by delivering more effective results in dismantling organised criminal networks. The independence of institutions involved in the fight against corruption needs to be enhanced, as they remain vulnerable to political pressure and other undue influence.

Since its establishment in 1997, the OSCE Presence's activities have developed into a wide range of issues, from arms control and the fight against trafficking to anti-corruption initiatives; gender mainstreaming and environmental projects; human rights protection; legislative, judicial, and media reform; and the capacity-building of law enforcement officials. In all these areas, the OSCE makes a very important contribution. We very much welcome Albania's commitment to working closely with the OSCE Presence across the three dimensions.

We furthermore appreciate the Presence's continuous focus on co-operation with international organizations on election standards and management, and its intention to continue working to support the Central Election Commission in implementing ODIHR's recommendations. In the eve of the official start of preparations for the 2017 parliamentary elections, it is essential that the electoral reform is concluded in due time, prior to elections, and in line with OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. The Central Election Commission needs to be legally empowered to properly monitor party finances and electoral campaigns, whilst all parties need to reflect and guarantee the legitimacy of the upcoming parliamentary elections.

We attach importance to gender mainstreaming as a cross-dimensional issue and commend the Presence in Albania for its work in that regard. The Presence's

activities in the media field should continue to focus on strengthening media independence and on the implementation of the existing legal framework.

We also welcome the continuing activities of the Presence in promoting effective policies concerning protection of rights of persons belonging to all minorities, and promoting the improvement of the legal framework in this regard, by adopting a comprehensive legislation so as to address the gaps which have been identified.

We note the signature of the Agreement establishing the Regional Youth Cooperation Office during the Paris Western Balkans summit in July as well as the decision to base its headquarters in Tirana. Building on the OSCE's Presence's successful work in promoting youth exchange and regional reconciliation, we are very pleased that it intends to join forces with the RYCO.

We welcome Albania's constructive engagement in regional cooperation and underline the importance of ensuring good neighbourly relations, which remain essential. We also appreciate the full alignment of Albania on all foreign and security policy issues.

We appreciate the continued focus of the Presence on evaluation, including the use of external evaluation, with a focus on outcomes. This serves as a model of best practise for other field operations.

In concluding, we would like to thank Ambassador Bochart and his staff for their high-quality work and their excellent political and operational cooperation and wish them every success in their activities.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.